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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: <u>SENV EAGR EAID TBIO ECON SOCI XR BR</u> SUBJECT: SOUTH AMERICA ESTH NEWS, NUMBER 74

11. The following is the seventy-fourth in a series of newsletters, published by the Brasilia Regional Environmental Hub, covering environment, science and technology, and health news in South America. The information below was gathered from news sources from across the region, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Hub office or our constituent posts. Addressees who would like to receive a user-friendly email version of this newsletter should contact Larissa Stoner at stonerla@state.gov. The e-mail version also contains a calendar of upcoming ESTH events in the region.

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## Agriculture

Agriculture

## 13. Brazil Launches Lab for Agricultural Nanotechnology

APR. 26, 2006 - Brazil is taking steps to increase the value of its exports by developing agricultural nanotechnologies - microscopic products intended to improve the quality of farm produce. The Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) said 17 April that it would be building a USD 1.9 million laboratory dedicated to the field. The National Nanotechnology Laboratory for Agribusiness will be housed at Embrapa's agricultural instrumentation unit in Sao Paulo. Areas of research have already been defined. They include producing 'nanofibers' to strengthen natural fibers, for example those from coconut and sisal, and making 'nanoparticles' that contain pesticides and control their release. Additional funds will support a network of researchers from Embrapa units, universities, research institutions and the private sector to encourage research collaborations.

Source - SciDev

14. Six South American Nations Seek Fund to Fight Foot-And-Mouth Disease

APR. 10, 2006 - Six South American nations have asked the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for a 100-million-U.S.-dollar loan to help fight foot-and-mouth disease. The six countries -- Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay -- discussed

the issue at the meeting of the Southern Agricultural Council, of which the countries are members, on April 10th in Brasilia. The loan will be used to put into action a three-year plan to fight the disease, according to Brazil's Minister of Agriculture Roberto Rodrigues, who added that the money was very likely to be granted, as it had been requested by such a large number of countries. The agricultural council meeting took place alongside the second International Conference on Agricultural Produce Tractability. Foot-and-mouth disease is a fast spreading virus which affects cattle, buffalo, pigs, goats and sheep. The disease is particularly a serious problem for Brazil, the world's largest beef producer, as it has faced import bans following outbreaks in the north of the country.

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Health

## 15. Thorium Reserves Being Pirated In Amazon State

MAY 09, 2006 - Brasilia's main newspaper reports that recently discovered thorium veins located at the banks of the Araguari River, in the Serra do Navio, Amapa State, are being illegally extracted and sold by the local population. This creates health hazards for the population because of the mineral's radioactivity and also a security risk, given that enriched thorium "can be used to make nuclear weapons," the report says.

Source - Public Affairs US Embassy Brasilia

## 16. Andean Countries Join in Fight Against Malaria

MAR. 28, 2006 - Health officials from Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela have signed a joint agreement to control Malaria in transborder regions between these countries. A plan of action was put together by the Andean Health Organization and received USD 28 million from the Global Fund to Combat AIDS, TB, and Malaria. The main objective of the plan is to reduce the number of cases by half in five years.

Source - El Tiempo

## 17. Brazil and Kenya Push For Neglected-Disease Research

APR. 19, 2006 - Brazil and Kenya will call for an international fund for research on 'neglected diseases' at a World Health Organization meeting in May. The diseases, which include leishmaniasis, malaria and sleeping sickness, kill more than 35,000 people each day in developing countries but get little attention from the global scientific community. Paulo Buss, president of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), a Brazilian research center, will propose the fund at the World Health Organization's annual policy-setting meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. The proposal urges the 192 World Health Organization member countries to commit funds for research on new drugs, vaccines and diagnostic kits. It also suggests simplifying systems for protecting intellectual property to make new health innovations more accessible to people in developing countries.

Source - SciDev

Water Issues

# 18. Pleas for Bogota River Clean-Up Ignored

APR. 2006 - Bogota's once-clean waters now receive 190,000 tons a year of residential and industrial waste upstream of the reservoir

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of Muna, built in 1948 to impound water from the Bogota River for

two hydroelectric plants. Muna has become a haven for infection, rats and mosquitoes-an estimated 74 million of which breed in the water hyacinth (Eichornia crassipes) carpeting the reservoir's nutrient-rich waters. For 15 years, local residents have held demonstrations, filed lawsuits and lobbied authorities to get the government to take action. In 2004, local residents thought relief was at hand. A lower court ordered the city of Bogota as well as the surrounding counties and departments, which are similar to states, to build wastewater-treatment plants. But many parties to the ruling, including the county and departmental governments, appealed to a higher court, arguing everything from excessive costs to insufficient time. With no decision yet handed down, the 32,000 inhabitants of this town are losing faith. They want Emgesa, the operator of Muna, to stop pumping the Bogota's putrid water into the reservoir. The scenario is not unique to Bogota. Strapped budgets and a lack of political will hobble efforts to clean up urban rivers throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. From Lima, Peru, where a cholera epidemic broke out in 1991, killing thousands of people, to the putrid waterways of the U.S-Mexico border, water management tends to be chaotic. More than 50 million people lack access to sewer service in urban areas of Latin America and the Caribbean, according to 2006 World Bank figures.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

19. Argentina: Nitrates Cited in Water-Contract Cancellation

April 2006 - Citing nitrate contamination of drinking water, Argentina has rescinded the contract under which French- and Spanish-owned Aguas Argentinas provided water and sewer service for Buenos Aires and 17 nearby municipalities. Government officials said that tests done in Lomas de Zamora, a city of 600,000 just south of the federal capital, detected nitrate concentrations up to 40 percent higher than permitted in household drinking water and 220 percent higher than allowed in well water. Authorities charge the findings reflect nitrate problems elsewhere in the service area, though they say the contamination in Lomas de Zamora is the most serious. They say Aguas Argentinas, in which Suez of France and Spain's Aguas de Barcelona hold stakes of 40 percent and 25 percent, respectively, has in recent years failed to make the investments needed to ensure adequate quality of service.

Source - EcoAmericas (contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

Forests

110. Brazil Shuts Down Amazon Logging Operation

APR. 10, 2006 - Environmental authorities shut down an illegal logging operation in the Amazon on April 10th, confiscating dozens of felled tropical hardwood trees in an area that only recently was pristine rain forest. The Norte Wood logging company was operating

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without a license in the Amazonas state town of Novo Aripuana. The agency seized 500 cubic meters (17,655 cubic feet) of wood and arrested one man in the raid. It was the largest seizure of illegal hardwood this year in Amazonas, the country's largest state. An overflight revealed extensive logging in the region, which only recently was largely untouched rain forest where scientists had discovered several new monkey species. During the past three years, loggers from the neighboring state of Para have been moving to Novo Aripuana after having largely deforested the southern edge of their home state.

Wildlife

111. Venezuela Guarantees Protection of the Arrau Turtles

MAY 12, 2006 - Thirty-five thousand Arrau turtles were released in the Orinoco River after being raised in the Arrau Turtle Wildlife

Refuge and Protection Zone. According to the Minister of Environment Jacqueline Faria, the Indigenous communities are the best preservers of the species since they have been taught the importance of how and why to conserve the species.

Source - kindly shared by US Embassy Caracas

112. 'Breakthrough' Reached On Access to Biodiversity Data

APR. 07, 2006 - Governments could come under pressure to make information on biological resources openly available, following a decision approved at the conference of parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Brazil. According to its decision, the COP "invites parties and other governments, as appropriate, to provide free and open access to all past, present, and future public-good research results, assessments, maps and databases on biodiversity, in accordance with national and international legislation". The language is vague, but according to Donat Agosti, a research associate at the American Museum of Natural History and the Swiss Naturmuseum, "This is breakthrough." "It means we can talk to our governments and argue for open access to this body of information, referring to this COP decision," he says. "But nothing will happen unless pressure and demand can be built up to implement it." Agosti has long pointed to the irony that researchers in developing countries - where most biodiversity is found - cannot access information about their nations' species.

Source - SciDev

113. Brazil Takes Active Steps against Biopiracy

APR. 19, 2006 - The GOB is concluding a list of more than 3,000 species of Brazilian plants that it will send to patents offices throughout the world to prevent them from being appropriated by foreign governments and companies for commercial use. Brazilian officials note the registering of the "cupuassu" fruit by a Japanese company in 2003 which has since been reversed.

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Source - Public Affairs US Embassy Brasilia

Protected Areas

114. Ecuadorian Official Weighs Oil Drilling In National Park

APR. 2006 - Ecuadorian Environment Minister Ana Alban says that by mid-year she will decide whether the state-owned Brazilian company Petrobras can resume its controversial project to drill for oil in Yasuni National Park; a highly biodiverse portion of Ecuador's Amazon region. Petrobras suspended preparations for the project last August, after Alban ordered the company out of the park pending a review of its plans. Petrobras had begun work on a road and pier in Yasuni and planned other support infrastructure. It has indicated that it would halt construction of the road permanently, locate its support facilities outside the park and transport all materials to and from its Yasuni well sites by helicopter. As of mid-April, however, Petrobras had not submitted a revised environmental-management plan addressing the new approach.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

 $\underline{\mathbb{I}}$ 15. U.S. Shareholders Criticize Goldman Sachs for Park Deal in Chile

APR. 17, 2006 - Goldman Sachs CEO Henry Paulson has come under fire from irate shareholders who say he is using company assets to further his own personal environmental goals in Chile. In 2004, under Paulson's leadership, Goldman Sachs donated a 2,750 square kilometer tract of land in southern Chile to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), creating the Karukinka wildlife reserve. As part of the arrangement, Goldman also put up USD6.6 million of its own money to fund the Chile environment project. However, a

group of shareholders has charged that Paulson had no right to use company assets in what they described a personal project, and suggest that his commitment to environmental conservation constitutes a conflict of interest. On April 6, a group called the Action Fund Management LLC (AFM) requested that Paulson reimburse the company for "any shareholder assets spent to advance his personal interests."

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

Science & Technology

116. Chilean Science Initiative Boosts Research Output

APR. 26, 2006 - A Chilean initiative aimed at boosting the nation's research output has substantially increased scientific publications and trained more than 300 young researchers in its first four years.

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These are the main findings of a progress assessment for Chile's Millennium Science Initiative (MSI), released on 19 April. The MSI is a collaboration between Chile and the World Bank. It was launched in 1999, creating three cutting-edge research institutes and five smaller centers called 'nuclei'. According to the study, the number of publications by researchers at these initial MSI centers increased by 30 per cent compared with their outputs before joining the centers - to an average of 3.1 per researcher per year between 2000 and 2003. The number of undergraduate and postgraduate scientists being trained at the centers increased eight-fold in the same period.

Source - SciDev

Industrialization & Pollution

117. Update on Uruguay-Argentina Pulpmill Dispute

APR. 27, 2006 - In Uruguay there has been widespread dissatisfaction over reports from Sao Paulo that Brazil and Argentina will not support the pulpmill dispute's submission to Mercosur's conflict resolution mechanism, as Presidents Lula da Silva and Nestor Kirchner apparently consider the affair to be purely bi-lateral. The reports also maintained that Argentine President Kirchner has called for another environmental impact study on the plants. The news came on the eve of President Vazquez' April 25 departure for a nine-day official visit to Mexico and the U.S. Uruguay contends that the dispute is multilateral in nature because the continued international bridge blockades have also affected commerce with Chile, Paraguay and Bolivia -- and indirectly involve Finland and Spain because their private companies are building the contested plants. Uruguay also maintains that the plants have been sufficiently studied for environmental concerns.

Source - MONTEVIDEO 000376

118. Other Environmental Problems to Focus on in Argentina

APR. 27, 2006 - The severe pollution of the Matanza-Riachuelo basin, which runs right through the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, the failure of authorities to do anything about the problem for decades, and the indifference of most local residents stand in sharp contrast to the recent protests led by the people of the Argentine town of Gualeguaychu, near the Uruguayan border. For the past few months, thousands of residents of that town in the province of Entre Rios have held demonstrations against the construction of two paper pulp factories on the Uruguayan side of a river that forms the border between Argentina and Uruguay. The provincial government and local businesses and residents in Entre Rios, worried about the pulp mills' potential impact on the environment, have joined forces in an attempt to get the Finnish and Spanish companies building the plants to move them away from the border. But little fuss has been made over the Matanza-Riachuelo basin, which has been heavily

polluted for over a century, and has never been the focus of any  $\tt BRASILIA~00000954~008~OF~013$ 

concerted clean-up effort.

Source - Inter Press Service (kindly shared by US Embassy Buenos Aires). Please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article

119. How Mercury Rules Designed for Safety End up Polluting

APR. 20, 2006 - Instead of being permanently removed from the environment, recycled American mercury frequently travels through a secretive and unregulated chain of processors and brokers that can

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often end with primitive African, Asian and Latin American gold mines. These operations make up one of the world's biggest markets for mercury. They're also one of the world's biggest sources of mercury pollution. In the northern Brazil town of Creporizao, miners buy flasks of recycled mercury from stores along the town's dusty street. Later, they use it to extract gold from the gravelly soil. The process sends the metal into the atmosphere where it can orbit the world as many as four times before settling in distant places, such as Maine's seemingly protected lakes.

Source - The Wall Street Journal (please contact Larissa for complete article)

120. Nitrogen Emissions Threaten Biodiversity 'Hotspots'

APR. 10, 2006 - Researchers have warned that rising nitrogen emissions from developing nations will soon threaten plant life in some of the most biodiverse parts of the planet. A team led by Gareth Phoenix of the University of Sheffield has shown that, in the mid-1990s, the average amount of nitrogen deposited on the planet's 34 biodiversity 'hotspots' was more than 50 per cent higher than the global average. They say this figure could more than double by 2050, at which time nitrogen levels in 17 of the 34 hotspots will exceed critical levels that European nations have set to protect their sensitive ecosystems. Brazil's Atlantic forest, the temperate forests of south-west China, much of South-East Asia, Sri Lanka and the Western Ghats mountain range in southern India are some of the hotspots facing the greatest increase in nitrogen deposition.

Source - SciDev

Energy

121. The next X-Prize: How about a 250 m.p.g. car?

MAY 08, 2006 - The challenge: Build the world's most fuel-efficient production car - one that gets maybe 250 miles per gallon and causes little or no pollution. The payoff: prize money from the group that awarded USD10 million for the world's first private spaceflight two years ago. When the X-Prize Foundation unveils its new high-mileage car contest later this year, it will join a small but growing number of competitive prizes for energy development. Proponents say it's a cheaper and faster way to unhook America from its oil dependency. Several of the prize ideas are coming from the federal government.

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For example: 1)The Department of Energy (DOE) is authorized to award up to USD10 million in incentives for next-generation technology that could turn wood and other fiber into ethanol; 2) The DOE was also authorized by last fall's energy legislation to offer a USD5 million "Freedom Prize" for tangible methods to cut US dependence on imported oil. In hearings April 27, Congress weighed a proposal for a new "H-Prize," which would dangle USD100 million in awards to speed up development of hydrogen-powered cars.

Source - Christian Science Monitor

APR. 25, 2006 - The largest operator of atomic reactors in the world is considering installing power stations in Chile within 10 to 25 years. French nuclear giant Areva Group is interested in developing nuclear energy in Chile to make an "atomic power station" (nuclear reactor) that would connect the electrical systems of the Great North and the central electric zone. "A thermonuclear power station is a solution to the Chilean power problems of the coming years," said Richard Chopplet, representative of Areva's Chilean branch.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

## 123. Canadian Company Might Build Dam In South Of Chile

APR. 2006 - The Canadian mining company Falconbridge announced March 31 that it is studying a plan to build a USD600 million hydroelectric dam on the Cuervo River in southern Chile's Aisen region. The 740-megawatt facility would be erected, possibly as early as 2010, on some of the land previously intended for the ill-fated Alumysa aluminum-plant project. Alumysa was shelved indefinitely by the Canadian firm Noranda in Sept. 2003 after it drew strong opposition from environmentalists, the salmon-farming industry and, ultimately, then-President Ricardo Lagos. In June 2005, however, Noranda was acquired by Falconbridge, a top world producer of copper, zinc and nickel. Falconbridge now appears determined to make use of the Patagonian water rights Noranda had held for the three hydroelectric dams it had planned to build to power its Alumysa plant.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

## 124. Argentina: The Environmental Costs of Biofuel

April 20, 2006 - After two years of debate, the Argentine Senate approved on April 19th a bill that will grant tax incentives to the producers of biofuels while guaranteeing them a share of the market for 15 years. The new legislation grants tax exemptions to farmers who use vegetable oil to produce biodiesel, sugar cane or corn to produce ethanol, or organic waste to produce biogas. To ensure a market for the alternative fuels, the state will guarantee that four years after the law goes into effect, gas stations will be under the obligation to offer gasoline that contains five percent ethanol and diesel comprised of five percent biodiesel. A report released in

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late 2005 by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) on biofuel prospects in Argentina and Brazil warned that the development of this sector would not come without a price for Argentina. The potential negative impacts included the replacement of other crops, disturbance of land rotation systems and undesired effects on the soil. As a result, the IICA stressed that a careful estimation of these impacts should form part of the overall evaluation of the costs and benefits of biofuel production initiatives.

Source - Inter Press Service

### 125. Brazil Seals Biggest Carbon Credit Deal with German Bank

APR. 06, 2006 - A Brazilian firm sealed the world's biggest carbon credit contract registered so far for an existing pro-environment project. Econergy International, the New York-based clean energy investment, management and consulting group which is responsible for the deal, said local company Biogas's project to generate electricity from garbage sold carbon credits is worth 1 million tons in reduced gas emissions to German state development bank KfW. In total, the Biogas project, which is a partnership with Sao Paulo mayor's office, should generate 8 million tons in carbon credits until 2012, which will be negotiated later. The project receives half of all waste in South America's biggest megalopolis, Sao Paulo, or about 80,000 tons per day, and uses the methane gas from the waste to generate 22 megawatts of electric power. Out of 207 carbon credit projects registered by the United Nations, 45 are Brazilian and 21 are managed by Econergy. These include a wind-powered

electricity generation park and power projects based on sugar cane bagasse.

General

126. Chile Signs Bill To Establish Environmental Minister

APR. 10, 2006 - Chilean President Michelle Bachelet officially proposed legislation that, if passed, will create a cabinet level position to oversee environmental issues. The position to be created is "president" of the National Environment Commission (Conama). Environmentalist lauded the announcement, while Bachelet explained that the creation of an environmental minister is part of "a commitment that my administration and I have made." The object of this project is to create "environmental protection institutions that are better able to meet the challenges that we as a country are facing," she said. "And the regions are going to have a fundamental role in the new environmental policies." Although no names have been mentioned, at least two leading environmentalists have been mentioned: Sara Larrain, the head of Sustainable Chile; and Ximena Abogabir, who leads the House of Peace. The proposed new legislation will not change the current organizational structure of Conama.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

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127. Chile-Argentina: Critics of Andean Mine Project File Complaints

APR. 2006 - Chilean opponents of plans for a massive gold mine straddling the Chilean-Argentine border filed a raft of administrative complaints last month, hoping to reverse a regional environmental body's conditional approval of the project. Residents of northern Chile's Huasco Valley joined the Santiago-based Latin American Observatory for Environmental Conflicts (Olca) and the international marine-protection group Oceana to file 70 complaints with the country's lead environmental agency, the National Environmental Commission (Conama). The valley residents, most of them farmers, assert that the USD1.5 billion project by Barrick Gold of Canada will cause water shortages and toxic pollution in the fruit- and vegetable-producing Huasco region. In a letter to new Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, who took office on March 11, Pascua Lama opponents urged rejection of the project on grounds that its environmental-impact statement was deficient. They also said Barrick failed to address fully the concerns that emerged during public consultations on the project.

Source - EcoAmericas (please contact Larissa Stoner for complete article)

128. Protesters in Chile Fight Pulp Plant

APR. 11, 2006 - Religious leaders, fishermen, environmentalists and surfers joined forces to protest against the construction of a paper plant in Ranquil, in southern Chile's Region VIII. The USD1.4 billion Nueva Aldea Forestry Complex and plant is opposed by local residents who fear it will contaminate their surrounding environment and strip them of their livelihoods. Residents fear there will be a repeat of what happened in Valdivia, Region X, where Celulosa Arauco and Constitution (Celco) - Chile's largest forestry company and the third largest company of its kind in Latin America - built a similar paper plant. A Nueva Aldea company spokesman assured protestors that the plant, which is due to start construction in June, abides by the highest environmental standards.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

129. Greenpeace go Home, Say Bumper Stickers in Brazilian City

APR. 28, 2006 - Some 3,000 vehicles in Santarem, on the west of the Amazon state of Para, are carrying stickers reading "Greenpeace Go Home. The Amazon belongs to Brazilians". The protest is being sponsored by local ranchers and timber harvesters who are unhappy

about the GOB's creation of areas for conservation and sustainable use.

Source - Public Affairs US Embassy Brasilia

130. Brazilian Receives Environmental Prize in the U.S.

APR. 25, 2006 - Brazilian environmental activist Tarciso Feitosa, from Altamira, Para, received on April 24th in the United States the

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USD 125,000 Goldman Environmental Prize for his work to preserve forest reserves in areas of land conflict. According to a Brazilian daily, the Goldman Award is considered to be "the Nobel Prize of the environmental sector."

Source - Public Affairs US Embassy Brasilia

 $\P 31.$  Fossils of What May Be the Latest King of the Carnivores Are Found In Argentina

APR. 18, 2006 - The fossilized remains of what may be the largest meat-eating dinosaur has been discovered in Argentina -- a bus-sized monster that attacked its prey in roving packs. The remains of at least seven of the beasts, named Mapusaurus roseae, were found clustered in 100-million-year-old rocks south of the city of Plaza Huincul in western Patagonia. Based on a shin bone that was about 3 feet long, researchers estimate that the largest adult in the group stretched about 41 feet and weighed about 15,000 pounds.

Source - Los Angeles Times (no link)

Update on Avian Influenza

¶32. PAHO Hosts Regional Conference on Avian Influenza in Bogota

MAY 08, 2006 - This regional conference (April 19-21), attended by 40 countries in the Western Hemisphere, focused on the provision of health care services in the event of an Avian Influenza outbreak. PAHO has hosted conferences on surveillance and other AI-related topics in past. Conference attendees were people who actually provide health care services, not ministers or national planners. Consequently, the meeting was highly technical and focused on diagnosis, various forms of treatment, health care protocols, functioning of national health services, handling of cadavers, etc. A general read out of the technical aspects of the meeting (in Spanish) can be found on the Colombia PAHO office website.

Source - US Embassy Bogota

 $\underline{\mathbf{1}}$ 33. State Department Attends USAID Avian Influenza Preparedness Meeting in Lima

May 11, 2006 - The Department of State was cordially invited by USAID/LAC to attend a regional meeting on preparedness and response to a possible avian influenza pandemic, May 02-05, in Lima, Peru. Attendees included USAID/Health representatives from several Latin American and Caribbean countries, including Brazil, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Peru; representatives from several international organizations such as FAO, IICA, OIRSA, PAHO, and OIE; as well as USDA/APHIS, NMRCD, and State Department representatives. The event was an opportunity to share experiences and learn about financial and technical resources that currently exist in case of an AI pandemic. Please contact Larissa Stoner for more information.

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